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"You understand me well? If any one has seen the affair or finds it out, you must regret it as an accident. You understand—a little accident of no consequence. Joseph, run and get some water and soap, and a scrubbing brush and remove quickly that red pool—besides, it isn't blood, you understand, it isn't blood. Go! Go quickly."

\* \* \* \*

In the meantime, Mme. de Solente and Phillipe de Mérillac had finished their tea to the music of the tziganes. The large room was almost empty; they rose and went toward the rotunda.

"Stop," said Beatrice, passing before the roulette, "I must see if my luck continues."

She took a coin out of her reticule and slipped it into a slot.

"This time, I play on the green."

The needle turned.

"I have won, Mérillac; I have won."

Several pieces fell into the receptacle.

"Decidedly, my dear friend," said the young man, "you have incredible luck. My compliments—you are very fortunate!"

Mme. de Solente immediately resumed the melancholy expression which rendered her countenance so charming.

"Happy," said she, smiling, "happy, because I have won these few sous! Alas!"

Suddenly she uttered a cry. Going down the steps of the entry, her foot had touched a red stain.

"What is that?" she asked, frightened. "Blood? Why, this is horrible!"

The servant, who was washing and scrubbing the stone, began to laugh quietly.

"Reassure yourself, Madame! it is not blood. It is something that has just been upset—paint, I think."

Mréillac smiled, and addressing his companion, said:

"My beautiful unhappy one, your love of sadness makes you imagine mournful things."

Then, wheedling, listless, her eyes half closed, Beatrice replied in a soft voice:

"My friend! If you only knew—suffering is the finest of pleasures!"

And they both went away into the night.

WLADIMIR D'ORMESSON.

*From La Revue hebdomadaire, Paris.*

## AN ITALIAN PUBLIC-HOUSE

TEMPERANCE reformers, poor dears, have often talked of reforming the public-house. They thought it a very clever idea to take an existing institution, in their eyes thoroughly bad, and turn it into something they would describe as snug, cosy, perhaps even home-like. There would be shining urns, bagatelles instead of billiards, thick sandwiches instead of sanded floors. Their ideal was a perpetual school-treat (with no treating), smugness masquerading as snugness, a chronic night-school where the

parson would condescend to go and smoke his pipe with "the men" on Thursday nights after dinner. It never occurred that, if "the men" had wanted such places, they would have had them long ago.

Now at first sight Italian public-houses are the British temperance reformer's ideal. There is little or no drunkenness, dullness reigns, yet at the same time there is no arbitrary interference with the liberty of the subject. Milan, for instance, has 6,208 licensed premises, one

for every 96 inhabitants. They are little shops, clean and bright, with a chair or two and a zinc bar and rows of gleaming bottles, but nine customers out of ten patronize the coffee-urns. These urns are fed by gas, and often emit the most pestilential smells, which no one minds. People come to gossip, but they do that in other shops. If I were ill, I should hate to go to the chemist and describe my symptoms, for I should have an audience of at least a dozen; they would be most willing to advise, but they might be long in consultation.

The further South you go—the more into wineland, that is—the less the people drink, perhaps on the analogy of finding a greedy child a job in a confectioner's shop.

The chief public-house in Cava dei Tirreni, some thirty miles beyond Naples, may be described as a type. It is at the corner of the public square, facing the fountain, and guide-books describe it as a landmark for starting to the Abbey in the Hills.

There is a big altar-counter of lacquered wood with a reredos of bottles and syphons. In front of this is a sort of confessional-box where an elderly man sits in velveteens. There is a chair on the floor below him, where a guest is usually in the attitude of consultation, the sort of deferential consultation one gives Mr. Speaker on a point of order.

Two or three young men, evidently the sons of Velveteens, hover about behind the bar and push biscuit-tins into alignment from time to time—if they were chess-players, you could fancy them muttering the Italian equivalent of *j'adoube*—or they stroll off into the next room to see if somebody is really playing billiards.

You enter and seat yourself. Velveteens bids you good-day. The young men do the same. The waiter looks up in

surprise. A soldier is writing a very long letter at another table. A little yellow Jew in top-boots has finished his coffee and flicks a tiny whip against his calves, and you watch him wondering whether he is made of gutta percha.

A sort of Father Christmas comes in like Boreas. He has a brigand cloak and a huge brown comforter to defy the Southern sun. No sooner has he crossed the threshold than he emits a torrent of artificial cheerfulness, strident, frosty geniality which lasts about three minutes. Velveteens rises and pats him and gives him his left hand to hold for a second; then Father Christmas subsides in a corner and yawns noisily, knowing that he will eventually have coffee.

Then a messenger comes in shirt-sleeves to fetch coffee for an office. Then people come and try to sell mysterious goods in baskets to Velveteens. Then there is a party with a child in arms.

Now that is an event. Velveteens dances about in front of the child and makes goo-goo faces to it, and eventually offers it a biscuit from one of the tins. That ceremony is scarcely over when one of the young men returns from the billiard-room. A child! That must be seen to at once. Dump into a biscuit-tin and another offering is made.

The waiter's half cigar is out. He crumples his paper, blinks and perceives you. It occurs to him that you may possibly want something. But on his way he is arrested by the child and a great grin steals over his fat face. What a happy thought, what a sublime inspiration: the child would like a biscuit. The child already has one in each hand, but with luck it may drop one; at any rate it can be bobbed to and grinned at and have its cheeks stroked. It is all Mieris or Ostade here instead of Caravaggio; there is even less gaiety than at the Gaiety.

You have long forgotten that you are usually expected to order drink in places where they drink. The man in blue remembers at last. What do you command? Oh! Cognac-seltz. There's an order for them in this syrup-shop! Four small boys are already assembled on the doorstep to watch and solicit cigarettes, and the young pastry-cook from over the way vainly tries to shoo them off.

The waiter settles down to anxious consultation with the two young men behind the altar. There is a long, pale, Greek-looking bottle of brandy, but it contains only dregs, and they wonder whether you will accept them. They all lean over Velveteens for advice, but he is busy with an old peasant woman, who is submitting a stamped paper that smells of rent. They decide to try on the dregs, but at the last moment Velveteens catches them and sternly reproves the idea of such *dispetto* to the *Signore*. They didn't intend disrespect, but this means fetching a fresh bottle, and the *Signore* may not care to wait. Bah! what is another half hour?

Such a ceremony at last for the opening of the new, thin, pale brandy-bottle. Blue Serge doubles himself up and struggles while Velveteens and the young men gather round with advice and Father Christmas yawns like John Peel's view-halloa. Pop! Phlump! The tiniest doll's wine-glass is poured out and held up to the light and emptied into a tumbler.

"Hi! That won't do!"

"What! More?"

"Yes, I am not a doll."

"Two glasses really?"

"No, six."

"Oh! these mad Englishmen."

Then all begin to wonder whether there is any soda. They squeeze every syphon on the reredos, but they are all dummies or at least derelicts. Velveteens insists

on sending out for a real one. But who is to go? The pastry-cook youth would go, only he is afraid he may not be back before closing-time. Father Christmas suggests sending one of the ten cabmen who have been in the square outside for a fortnight without ever finding a job. They begin cracking their whips at the very idea. But you accept Blue Serge's suggestion that the pump water is very good.

Blue Serge's joy is short-lived, for he finds that his pet seat by the window has now been usurped by Father Christmas, and another soldier has come in wanting another pen and ink.

"Six brandies," you announce proudly, fumbling your fob.

"Six brandies—six pence," Blue Serge drawls in the tone of "Why ask such silly questions?"

Six pence and a penny for himself! Blue Serge almost stands to attention: you are not sure about tears of gratitude. Well, you *are* a milor!

"*Grazie, Signore*," says Blue Serge, though the expression of thanks is rare in Italy.

The young men raise their hats and thank. Velveteens thanks and hopes to see you again. The Jew looks all the way down his nose, hoping to see the last of such extravagance. Father Christmas unpacks himself and spits on the floor. Now your reputation is made. You are the Englishman who ordered and drank six brandies all at once, and then gave the waiter more than sixteen per cent. on your expenditure.

I am sure Velveteens keeps a log (though none drink port here), and in it will be recorded:

"Brandy drunk here to-day, by a mad Englishman."